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ABSTRACT

Camps offer a unique opportunity to inform parents of the psychological workings of their child through information based on a large repertoire of situations. Camps can be interpreted to parents as a better way to observe, record, and report how their children: (1) reacted to "on-hand contact"; (2) accepted duties and responsibility; (3) improved their skills; (4) overcame difficulties, such as fear, in improving their skills; (5) interacted with others; (6) adjusted to being away from home; and (7) viewed themselves. Observations and records, kept by more than one counselor, eliminate bias and provide different settings for observation. Reports should be free of psychological jargon and secondary assumptions. Records, which contain detailed descriptions of what was done by the child (threw things, destroyed his own property, spit, etc.) are accepted by parents better than labeling (temper outbursts, spoiled child, etc.). A positive outcome at camp is noting the acquired skills and interests the child pursued instead of watching TV. (AH)

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INTERPRETING CAMP TO PARENTS

A Better Way to Observe—Record— Report

Moisy Shopper, M.D.

An Occasional Paper issued by the Fund for Advancement of Camping

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Moisy Shopper was born in New York City in 1930, got his A.B. at New York University in 1951, and his medical education at the State University of New York (SUNY). After an internship at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland, CA., and residency in Brooklyn, he received the certificate for adult psychoanalysis in 1965. After three years at the Institute for Psychoanalysis in Chicago, he received it for children.

He taught for seven years at SUNY (1959-66). Since 1966 he has been a clinical professor of Child Psychiatry at the St. Louis University School of Medicine. He maintains a private practice in psychiatry in addition to teaching.

Dr. Shopper is married and has three boys who have attended five different camps. He has been a camp doctor several times and has many patients who have been to camps or worked as counselors. This background of academics, practice, and home gives him an intimate and unique perception of the camp experience. He is well known in the St. Louis area as a speaker and panelist on radio and TV, and for school and community groups.

Dr. Shopper first came to our attention as an author in *Camping Magazine's* "Year of the Child" series. In the May 1979 issue in his article, "The Camp Experience is Maturing," he states that camps "should recognize their contribution to the child's emotional growth and report on the child's status in this area." Dr. Shopper was invited to tell camp people how this should be done and "Interpreting Camp to Parents" is the result. We hope you find his Paper helpful and invite your comments on it.

Dr. Moisy Shopper

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Those interested in joining FAC in its search for the best in camping innovation, research, and program development are urged to support this cutting edge of the total camping movement. All contributions are tax deductible and should be sent to the address at the bottom of this page.

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INTERPRETING CAMP TO PARENTS
A BETTER WAY TO OBSERVE—RECORD—REPORT

Moisy Shopper, M.D.

Those in the field of camping need to ask this crucial question: Why is camping as a professional field of activity not regarded by those in the field and by others as a professional discipline on par with other professions such as education?

Unfortunately, there has been a paucity of research and discussion in this area. An academic approach to camping, when offered, tends to focus on the economic, public relations, business, and technical aspects of camping. Why is education state supported, compulsory to age 16, and recognized as a requirement for future success? Teachers are degreed and licensed while camping is usually a private venture dependent on parental willingness to part with their money, and regarded more as a pleasant luxury than as an important contribution to a child's developmental future.

The status of work with children

The intention here is not to hold up education as an ideal or as even having a coveted place in our social structure. In fact, teachers (elementary school and high school to a lesser extent) occupy a rather devaluated position in our society as do all who work with young children. As a rough measure of devaluation, look at the criteria of prestige and pay scale. The latter, it is true, is often a reflection and index of the former. The pediatrician, as well and thoroughly trained as any other specialist, clearly assumes as much responsibility for life/death matters as any other specialist, and keeps hours which are not better, and often worse, than others. Nevertheless, as a group, they earn less than most other specialists.

When the American Academy of Child Psychiatry was being formed 25 years ago, many of the non-child psychiatrists doubted the need for this specialty or the special training and skills required. Even within the field of psychoanalysis, the child analyst is felt to be a lesser brand of analyst, and many believe children can't be analyzed.* Nursery school teachers frequently work on a lower pay scale than teachers of older children. It is only in recent years that "early childhood education" is recognized as a highly specialized area in education that requires special skills and training. Day care workers, entrusted with the care of the very young child, when the foundations of the personality are being built, are among the poorest trained, lowest paid, and have the lowest standards for licensure, if required to be licensed at all.

The only less prestigious, less paid, and less trained person caring for children is the mother herself. She often sees herself as ill-educated and poorly prepared for the job, inadequately supported by husband and society, and receiving only a lip service veneer of prestige. Is it any wonder that more and more women seek rewards in the working world and veer away from the pleasures and frustrations of parenthood?

Camping not only deals with children but also deals with the outdoors and physical activity, both of which are regarded as the antithesis of learning. Somewhere along the line we have accepted the bias that genuine learning has to take place indoors, as though the children and their minds would surely wander away if class were held outdoors. To be outdoors is often viewed as an escape, to be free, and to enjoy. Unfortunately, our society is extremely suspicious of anything that purports to be educational and is nevertheless enjoyable and informal, as though education and enjoyment could not coexist.

Physical activity is likewise seen as antithetical to learning; educational success is often tied to one's ability to sit immobile and relatively awake for longer and longer periods of time. We need only think back to our own childhood school rooms where the seats were neatly riveted to the floor and the children neatly riveted to their seats. We still suffer from the stereotypical dichotomy of "the athlete" versus "the brain" as though a child could be only one and not the other. The scholar/athlete is recognized but as the unusual exception to the rule.

So it is that camping, by its very nature, activates the prejudices of many: it deals with children, it is held outdoors, it presents itself as enjoyable, and also encourages physical activity. These factors lead the public and other professionals to accept a devaluated image of camping and the camping profession. While the reasons for this state of affairs can be understood, it is sad when many within the camping profession think no better of themselves than their detractors. Camps have to be presented as more than a nice place in the country, where the child can be kept healthy, safely occupied, and sufficiently pleased to want to return the following year.

Camps are unique facilities

Few camp directors/owners think seriously of their role as educators and developers of the child, or as offering a

*While there is much debate concerning theory and technique of child analysis, there is no doubt that as soon as a child is able to verbalize and understand language, he can be analyzed.

unique facility for the emotional growth and development of the child. Yet, whether inadvertently or deliberately, the camp experience does do both, although it may be difficult to write about in P.R. brochures and even more difficult to measure in numbers and percents. One cannot openly advertise an "emotional growth-enhancing camp" without sounding pompous at best, or a cocktail party psychiatrist at worst. However, the director and staff who believe it and are knowledgeable about the emotional issues need little advertising as such. It will be apparent in their approach—their respect for the child as a developing personality and their respect for the opportunity of camping to contribute to this development.

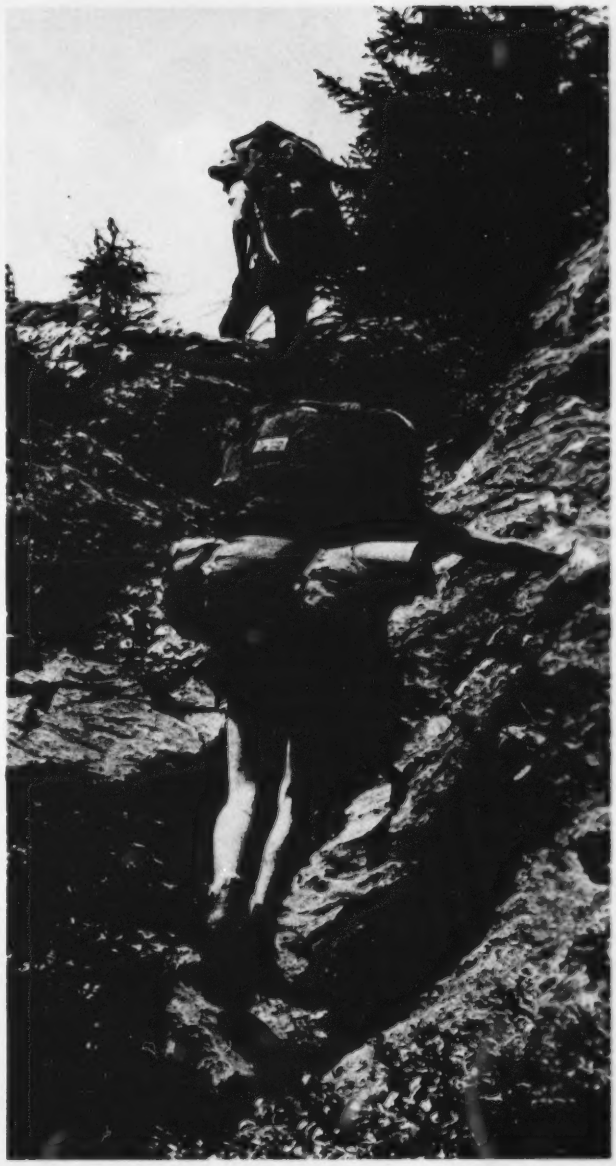
Some camps are not camps in this author's use of the term, but are summer outdoor organizations designed specifically to enhance the child's skill in a certain area, to give that child an advantage in the competitive social structure of the city. Such camps are the tennis camps, music/drama camps, weight reduction, remedial education camps, and the like. The purposes of such camps are to enhance those areas having a high value in the non-camp social structure as defined by the parents' perceptions. These camps echo the traditional values of the city and the school year. They neither challenge nor complement these values. A real camp both challenges and complements existing values in several ways.

While camps are nowadays far from primitive, they nevertheless tend to foster an antitechnological/anti-urban approach. Technology, such as it is, tends to be simple to antiquated. Living is often reduced to minimal health and survival levels which not only simplify life immensely but build greater self-reliance. Camps are initially evaluated by parents from a technological perspective—size of cabins, number of tennis courts, toilet and showers, number of motor boats, trucks, canoes. Undoubtedly, these views must be respected and perhaps catered to. However, the major assets of a camp are its natural habitat and how that is used, the criteria by which staff are chosen, and the attitudinal and philosophical orientation of the director. Just as each city seeks to lure tourists with its recreational, educational, and cultural advantages, so too the director has to clearly delineate the environmental aspects of the camp setting and the multitude of its uses which will contribute to the camping experience.

Learning is indelible at camp

Depending on the camp's unique features, there are many areas of cognitive learning provided which are not taught in school and perhaps cannot be taught in the classroom. At camp, "on-hand contact" with the actual subject matter provides the child with an experience and a host of multiple sensory images and perceptions that not only complement book learning, but help make it indelible.

For example, many school children know that wool comes from sheep and that they wear wool sweaters. While not a complicated concept it is nevertheless abstract, and other than the tangible wool sweater, outside the child's experience. However, to actually feel the dirty matted wool on the sheep, participate in sheep dipping, sheep shearing, cleaning and carding the wool, informs the child of the many specific steps involved. Otherwise the jump from sheep's wool to sweater is either seen as magical or not even thought of at all. While this may be an exaggeration, it is amazing how many children think lettuce grows in supermarkets neatly wrapped in cellophane.



Camp is a respite from the highly technological society; and while varying greatly from camp to camp, a different value system often prevails, one based more on ecological concepts and/or the Native Americans' (Indians) respect for the land and their sense of spiritual harmony with nature. A more realistic appreciation of our fragility and vulnerability may well ensue as we learn how very interdependent one form of life is on another, and how everything living is dependent on solar energy and a small thickness of topsoil. This attitude, which is desirable, is not easily attained by children surrounded by T.V., hi-fi's, electronic toys, junk foods, and the complexities of subdivisions, ghettos, and shopping malls. It is as though children, once hooked on technological toys and comforts, must first be "weaned" and then "rehabilitated" to an

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awareness with an ecological and natural perspective. Some camps formally teach this in their nature programs, while others simply "live it" in their daily activities without specific didactic instruction. Other than offering a good nature study program, many camps have not clearly defined this as a desirable attitude which they can foster, or realize that they are in the most favorable position to do so. It is, perhaps, one of the most underused and underestimated assets of a camp, one which some directors would hesitate to emphasize for fear that it might make their camp appear mystical, overly scientific, or just plain "way out."

Camp is an acting/doing place

Attitudinal changes, while definite, are not tangible and thus difficult to quantify. One could devise tests to measure the degree to which any message is understood and assimilated. However, it might well be counterproductive since we are not attempting to inculcate factual knowledge but to convey an attitude, a perspective, a new mode of thinking about old facts. The communication of a point of view will often not proceed through formal factual teaching by any one person, but rather by the example of staff members through the duties and pleasures of everyday routines. Camping is not so much what is said, but rather what is done and how it is done. Actions speak loudly and, unlike school, camp is an acting/doing place. To that degree it is capable of packing a louder message than school could if both had equal time with children.

The measurement of athletic skills is much easier. The beginning swimmer advances by the end of camp to an intermediate and knows which skill subtests he has passed to become an intermediate. The child who has attended camp can now horseback ride, sail, water ski, play tennis better, etc. The skill increment is not only easily measured, but readily demonstrable to the parents. Further, it is transferable to life outside camp and thus often provides a distinct advantage when the camper returns home.

Sports, skill acquisition, and competitiveness are often in the forefront of the parents' wishes. Accordingly, many directors decide to cater to these wishes. Those directors who chose *not* to go this route, forego the ease and simplicity of (a) describing their camp's offering, (b) listing its goals, and (c) measuring the child's gains.

Factors in psychological growth

Directors as well as parents emphasize sports for the character building and emotional growth which sports can provide, but often confuse the attainment of competence and athletic victories with character growth. Sports is only one form of physical activity, albeit a very special form. We should realize that non-sport forms of physical activity likewise make a distinct contribution to the child's psychological growth. Any physical activity which tests the body's capacity to perform, which taps new skills or new uses and experiences, all serve to increase the level of regard and confidence a child has in his body. Hiking, climbing, using an axe, portaging, and cycling are non-sport activities which can contribute significantly to the sense of pride and pleasure and knowledge of one's own body.

Knowledge of one's own body should be regarded as a basic and crucial form of self-knowledge. Physical activities and experiences increase body awareness and contribute to an appreciation and regard for one's own body. This enables the child to consolidate his body image and sense of competence as well as to enlarge it to keep pace with his physical and experiential growth.

Sportsmanship, in many ways the essence of sports, is often overlooked in the rush to win and the pressure to achieve. A "good sport" is not an uncaring fool, but one who can help and cooperate with teammates, who can recognize and respect a fine player even if an opponent, who can keep the delicate balance between "The game is everything—we must win" and "It's only a game—let's have fun." A "good sport" is "good," win or lose, and can abide by rules and referees.

Look beyond the skill level

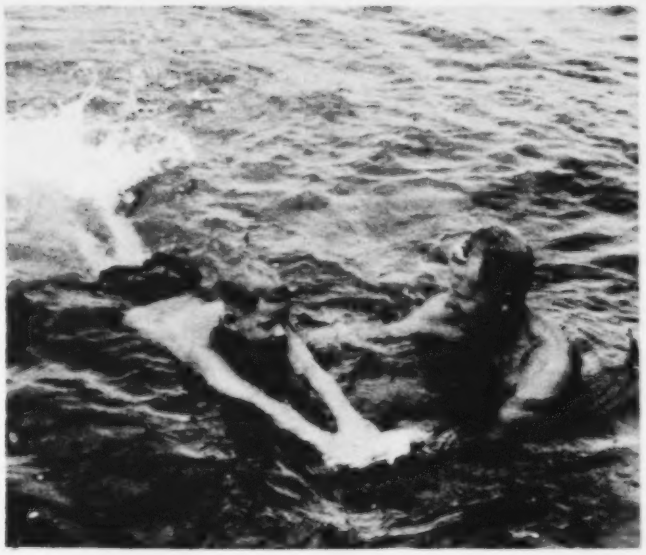
It is worth noting, in getting a base line level of functioning at the beginning of camp, the skill level in a particular physical activity as well as the attitudes and behaviors that accompany the skill. Intuitively, counselors and coaches attempt to remedy the unsportsmanship behavior of their campers, but they could do it in a more systematic way. For example, while a child is swimming, it is not only necessary to note that his breathing and arm and head movements are not coordinated but also that he insists that he is doing it right, feels you are criticizing him unfairly, tends to avoid you and the water, and is learning very slowly. You speculate that he has the feeling that he will never learn and his body is not capable of the task. Staff then evolves a specific strategy to which the child responds. This type of observation and recording, although cumbersome and time-consuming, may have many advantages: improved and sharpened counselor staff, greater knowledge of the child, and a well-documented report for the parents.

Parents are eager for these types of behavioral observations of their child, particularly since it is an easy step for them to extrapolate from the behavior to the psychological structure of the child. The latter is of marked concern to parents, but unfortunately too few people dealing with the children take the time and/or develop the skills for this type of reporting. Consequently, parents have to rely on grades, merit badges, and other "objective" measures of progress.

It is not necessary, in fact it is detrimental, to attempt to "analyze" the child or to get into the depths of the unconscious psychic conflicts. Even with a measure of training, a psychological analysis, even if correct, would not be accepted by parents and, in fact, would be resented as an unapproved intrusion into their child. What is necessary is the careful, concise, and complete recording of the child's behavior by different observers (to eliminate observer bias) and in different settings (to see the complete child). Observations should be free of psychological jargon and secondary assumptions. For example, it is better to record that a child threw things, destroyed his own property, yelled, spit, and attacked someone near him, than to say that he had a "temper outburst" or that "he flew into a rage." The observational data will speak for itself in most instances and need not be judged or evaluated as to its meaning. Some parents do not want to know, or would only become confused or angry if any labeling ("hyperactive, spoiled, overprotective, selfish, or self-centered") of the child were to be attempted.

Children, T.V., and camp

One thing that camp personnel can be proud of is their (often unknowingly) "cold turkey" cure of T.V. addiction. While many parents and teachers bemoan the general state



of T.V. and the wasteland in children's programming, they often confine their activities to complaining and grumbling. In the households, the child is master of the knob and has memorized channels, programming, and a mass of catchy commercials. Children's watching of T.V. rivals and excels their contact with their parents. At times, the child sits entranced by the screen and to get his attention requires interposing oneself between the child and screen. T.V. watching is frequently a source of sibling squabbles unless the family pays the price for "peace" by providing a T.V. set for each child. No more squabbles but lots more addiction.

The intensity and degree of T.V. addiction will vary with each camper; what is invariable, regardless of the city of origin, is the unmitigated garbage that networks feed children. It seems certain that network and station programmers are not involved in education, enlightenment, or even entertainment, but are out to sell more toys, cereals, and candy. It is impressive how much creativity goes into the commercials and how little into the actual programs. It is not meant here to go into the pros and cons of children's T.V. other than to emphasize that, for the most part, T.V. watching is worthless to harmful, and that many children are in the literal and technical sense of the word—addicted.* Of the camps with which I have had intimate contact (4), none had a T.V. set and I assume most camps do not. It seems almost antithetical to camping, even on rainy days.

For heavily addicted children, the absence of the T.V. is almost a trauma of major proportion. Contrary to natural assumptions, some of the homesickness is not just a desire to see parents and family, but also a desire for the T.V. set. Although parents might want their child "unhooked," they are often unable to do this themselves. For some parents it would be too hypocritical since they, too, are addicted. Others cannot discipline or be consistent, or they benefit too greatly from having a child quietly occupied, and not fighting, complaining, or clinging.

Camp does the job definitively and swiftly. Hopefully, during the camp experience, the child will develop skills and interests which can replace T.V. The fact that a camp returns the child to the parent "unhooked" along with additional skills should be emphasized to the parents. Camp directors should take a stand on T.V. and help educate the parents, expressing the hope that the usual T.V. routines are not reinstituted once the camper returns home. It might be of interest to include questions on the camp application form relating to the amount of T.V. watching the child does (hours/day, total/week) and the parental attitude toward it. Similarly, when the child is in camp present him with a day/hour calendar and ask him to list which programs are routinely watched. At camp's end, it might be worth noting that (a) this child did not watch his customary ____ hours/week, (b) that this child developed _____ skills and _____ interests which could be pursued instead of T.V., and (c) that if any change in rules governing T.V. are going to be made they should be done so as soon as the child is home lest old routines supervene.

Camp reveals the true child

Cabin living represents an "experiment in nature" where a youngster is separated from family and all that is familiar, and placed for a prolonged period in an unfamiliar situation with unfamiliar people.* Then how he reacts and adjusts can be seen. Some children are too young for such an experiment, others do not have parental permission (i.e. are not sent to camp), and still others participate for only 2- or 3-week periods at first.

For some the experiment is not too traumatic since other campers are from his own school, a counselor is a good friend of his older brother, or better yet he was in camp the year before. Directors, through a variety of precamp techniques, generally attempt to make the unfamiliar familiar. How the camper responds to the challenge or trauma of cabin life provides a valuable insight into the child's personality as well as the strength of his adaptational and coping mechanisms. If the child's personality is not overwhelmed by the adaptational task, it is perceived as a challenge; if overwhelmed, as a trauma.

Standards concerning leadership and peer position which applied in school do not apply in camp. The disciplinary hierarchy is different, the immediate in-charge person being a person much closer in age than the adult teacher. For elementary grade boys, the camp counselor is often the first male disciplinary figure they have encountered on a personal basis. The average counselor is somewhere between an older sibling and an adult. Discipline and

*For further information consult: Action for Children's Television (ACT), Melody, Wm., "Children's T.V. the Economics of Exploitation" Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973., and Cater, Douglas and Strickland, Stephens, "T.V. Violence and the Child." Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1975.

*An "experiment in nature" refers to a situation, arising naturally, which can be viewed as offering a set of experimental conditions, if we can figure out what experiment is taking place. For example, I might want to know whether female sex hormones are necessary for the attainment of a sense of femininity and womanhood. We can't deliberately choose a child as a subject and surgically remove the ovaries. However, when a child is born whose ovaries are totally absent (a rare congenital anomaly), we have indeed been presented with an "experiment in nature" and can then observe the sexual development of that child, as though we have ordered that condition.

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authority are more informal and flexible than at home or school. At times, campers are given wide latitude; at other times, immediate and unquestioning obedience is demanded (water safety, tripping). How each child responds to this authority and discipline, and to the different staff members in those positions, reveals a great deal about the child.

Some children who are certain of their own worth, and basically like themselves, assume others will like them as well. They move easily into friendships and social interactions. Some children possess their friends, subjugate them, and viciously fight off any third party intrusions into their private family. Some watch, bide their time, are friendly when approached, do not have any need for twenty "best friends," and settle comfortable into an non-clique friendship with one or two others. Some begin with the assumption that they are not liked, and if they err by being liked, will antagonize and provoke with great effectiveness to make their inner assumptions a reality consensus. Then they complain that no one likes them. There are a myriad of ways to approach a cabin peer situation, and each child approaches it with his unique strengths, fears, and prior experiences.

Observe, record, and report

While a camping season is short compared to a school year, the intensity of 24 hour-a-day living together counterbalances the reduced time. Power relationships, leadership, and friends will change significantly during the course of a camp session. Fluctuations in these areas over a period of time are extremely important to observe and record. Some children fade over time while others start slowly, gain steadily, and continue strong. The latter camper would be handicapped by a short camp session, while the former may need a lot of help but not be noticed because of his excellent start.

Schools seldom report to the parents on these aspects of the child unless the child has problems in these areas: "Talks too much to friends, does not follow directions, gets into fights." Teachers purport to be interested in the personality of the child, but their report cards and conferences confine themselves to subject learning (reading, math, etc.), achievement scores, and academic skills (attention span, organizes work well, et al). Personality becomes an issue only when it causes trouble in the classroom or in the learning task.

Camps have a unique opportunity to inform the parents of the psychological workings of their child, through information based on a large repertoire of situations. In most cases the parents have never had an opportunity to observe their child's action in these situations. Reporting to parents about these aspects of the child will help educate them about the uniqueness of the camp experience and its role in contributing to the emotional and intellectual development of the complete child.*

Those in camping have a tradition of which to be proud, but they, like the child, can grow, learn, and expand their range of knowledge and activities.

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*They have not seen the child in those situations, and if they had been able to observe, the mere presence of the parent would alter the child's reaction.

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